The Strength of Garlic's Flavor Depends on How You Cut It

Whether your garlic is whole, sliced, minced, or turned into a paste can have a big effect on how it tastes.

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Published on May 5, 2022

I love the spicy, pungent flavor and aroma of garlic; we use it in our kitchen almost every day. Recipes call for garlic in various forms—whole, sliced, minced, and sometimes even paste. That's because the way you cut garlic determines its potency.

Garlic's characteristic flavor comes from a compound called allicin which is produced when the walls of garlic are broken down. The more you slice, chop, or crush garlic the more allicin is produced and the more pungent the garlic will be.

Recipes list which preparation to use, but if you want to increase or decrease the potency of garlic in a dish or you're not following a recipe, it's important to know how to harness the power of garlic to get the amount of flavor you're looking for.

For Mild Garlic Flavor

Whole cloves are a mellow source of garlic flavor. The cloves' cell walls have not been ruptured yet, therefore no allicin has been produced. We gently cook whole cloves in oil (garlic confit) which imparts a nutty, sweet garlic flavor to the oil (this also creates mild, nutty flavored garlic cloves).

For Moderate Garlic Flavor

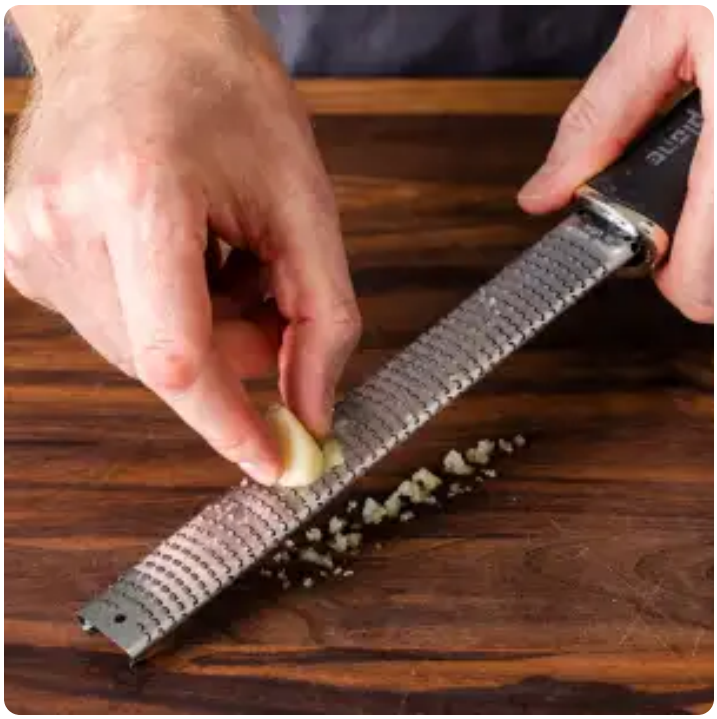
Sliced garlic's potency falls between whole cloves and minced garlic. Some of the cell walls have been broken down so a small amount of allicin has developed. Roasted Garlic Hummus and Pan-Steamed Kale with Garlic both use sliced garlic.

For Strong Garlic Flavor

Minced garlic is created by chopping cloves of garlic into small pieces. We use minced garlic when we want powerful garlic flavor, as in Quick Tomato Sauce, Garlicky Spaghetti, and Garlic Mashed Potatoes. Allicin continues to develop after it's been produced, so if you leave minced garlic sitting around it will continue to develop strong flavors.

For Very Sharp Garlic Flavor

Garlic paste, which we use in pesto, aioli, and this Really Good Garlic Bread, is made by grating garlic using a rasp-style grater or by repeatedly dragging the side of our knife over coarsely-salted minced garlic. This breaks down as many cells as possible, creating sharply-flavored, pungent garlic.



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